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ABSTRACT

The process of interrupting the reading of a text in order to predict what is to come is a well-established reading instructional technique known as Directed Reading/Thinking Activities (DRTA). Predictive intervention, a classroom structure based on this technique, is more frequently productive of creative revision than either teacher advice or the type of student group that tries to evaluate written products. Coherent and incoherent texts and good and poor readers must be considered when using predictive intervention in the classroom. Using predictive intervention with highly coherent textual material helps teach a model of the reading process as an interaction of mind and text, the importance of structural signals and organization patterns, and what expectations particular genres fulfill. At the reader/writer junction, students exist fully as writers, reading their work paragraph by paragraph and witnessing the responses of the readers--seeing both sides of the reader/writer interaction. This exercise forces students to face the fundamental nature of the writing enterprise, incorporates revision as a necessary part of the writing process, and teaches students to seek feedback even outside the classroom environment. The reader/writer junction can even be used at the prewriting stage. In fact, the only stage of the writing process in which it appears useless is in editing: poor grammar and spelling are unnoticed by fellow perpetrators of such errors. (JL)

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MEET ME AT READER/WRITER JUNCTION

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Fellow teachers of the language arts, please be my guests at Reader/Writer Junction where a small group of students are gathered, reading their compositions. I like to have the students parley at this germinal spot before dispatching their compositions out to Writer/Teacher Gap where the Red Ink River Flows. If you like what goes on at this get-together, you can find/found the same location in your classroom, so allow me to give you a tour of Junction City, though you must understand that it never looks exactly the same twice.

Today, Zenaida, Joyce, Keith, and Bernadette are each passing around copies of her comparison/contrast theme (written on 4-part carbonized paper available from 3M). After deciding to start with Zenaida's theme, everyone rolls or folds her paper so that only the first paragraph is visible. She reads it aloud:

"My mother and aunt Lulu are so diferent you cant believe their sisters. Moms house you could eat off the floor, the windows are washed every month, and nothing lays around for long. Aunt Lulu keeps so much junk you cant find a place to sit. She always cooking and talking, no time to clean."

Joyce confidently predicts, "I think you are going to tell how your aunt's house is more fun to be at, and that's where the family goes to hang out, especially you. You might be going to say that you like your aunt because everybody takes her their problems."

Keith takes his turn: "I agree with Joyce, plus I think you will say how your mom drove you nuts with her cleaning. Nobody can be comfortable around her. She's kind of cold, but your aunt is friendly and feeds everybody. Maybe you will end up saying you are more like your aunt than your mom."

Bernadette volunteers, "Zenaida's going to tell next what her aunt cooks and who she talks to and what they talk about. I want to know more about her aunt."

The opening predictions based on the first paragraph finished, it is now time to hear and read the second paragraph, but Zenaida is holding her head. In tones of consternation, she says, "Oh you guys, it's going to take a jump." Given the rules of this frontier society, there is only one way to discover the meaning of this comment, and that is to read and hear what comes next.

Paragraph Two: "Its just disguisting how my aunt keeps her rooms. The floors hav'nt been clean so long they could never look good. The window bords are peeling cause she leaves them open. My mom owns the house, and she lives in the upstairs. She can't kick Lulu out, she thinks cause their sisters."

After an appropriate time of shuffling, murmuring and chuckling, Keith declares, "Well, Zenaida, if I'd known your mother was the landlady to your aunt, I wouldn't have...you know...clean and dirty is different when you are the owner of something."

Joyce pouts, "I still think I'd like your aunt better. At least she cooks."

Bernadette is ready to predict ahead. She says, "I think you are going to tell how the trouble builds up between them until they don't speak to each other. Maybe you end up the go-between."

Zenaida smiles with pleasure. Mindful of the rules, she does not tell Bernadette that she is on the track now, for this prediction will soon be confirmed by the reading of paragraphs three and four. It so happens that Zenaida has all the feedback she needs to revise and re-structure her theme. If she had not, she could have asked the audience questions, or even the teacher, until she felt ready to try again for "the smooth reader ride" (predictability).
To test out her second draft, Zenaida will need a new group that knows nothing of her first draft. Here is what happened on her next attempt:

"The trouble began when my mother decided to rent the downstairs to her sister. My mom is ten years older than aunt Lulu, she's use to looking out for her. They got along OK before but now Ma has to look out for the house too cause it is all she got. Aunt Lulu messy ways get on all our nervs."

"You cant believe these two women could be related. Upstairs is all neat and so clean, but downstairs you wouldn't wat to send a rat in there on an errand. No one likes to go over there cause you might step on something or get yourself dirty. But I have to go down there, when Ma goes down there, its likely to be a fight."

No method or structure, of course, can guarantee the kind of insight that Zenaida had at Reader/Writer Junction, but this classroom structure is more frequently productive of such a creative re-vision than either my advice or the type of student group which tries to evaluate written products.

The process of interrupting the reading of a text in order to predict what is to come will be recognized by many of you as a well-estab'ished reading instructional technique known as "Directed Reading/Thinking Activities (DRTA).[1] It is ideal to have several sessions of class prediction on both fiction and non-fiction before planning to treat the students' themes in this way. If you have not engaged in predictive intervention before, you will learn that nothing works well except readings that are within the range of your students' comprehension and that are well written. The process exposes, as does no other strategy, incomprehension (partial or total), its causes in the reader (conceptual, vocabulary, or unfamiliarity with genre), and weaknesses in the writing itself.

For purposes of illustration, try to predict what may follow from the opening sentence of a text called "Whale Jazz" from Science Digest:

"The seas resound with eerie, elaborate jam sessions, but what do these songs mean to the huge mammals singing them?"[2]

1. Russell Stauffer, The Language-Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading, second edition, (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 184-213.

2. Adapted from Science Digest, January, 1982, p. 74.

As a sophisticated reader, you know what the subject of this reading is, and you know also that the text will attempt to answer the question that it asks. You might know something of the nature of that answer from other sources, or you might not. Should you know all about it already, in which case you could pretty well predict everything that should be said, you would merely skim or not read the article at all.

Students made some of the following predictions from this same sentence: 1) "This will be a story about large creatures from outer space who sneak into the ocean and make sounds underwater by rubbing their legs together. No one knows if this is music or talking." Such a prediction shows an intelligent imagination and a good deal of vocabulary comprehension within the given text - "seas," "eerie," possibly "jam sessions," "huge," "mammal" as some kind of creature. However, the genre is wrong; this is not going to be a story. You knew that of course, but how? Stories seldom start off with a declarative statement in the third person, followed by an abstract question. Science Digest is also a large clue, but for this student, there may not be a strong differentiation between science and science fiction.

2) "This will be about whales who sing when a lot of them get together in a small area, and nobody can figure it out." This student is probably unfamiliar with the term, "jam session" so is interpreting it as meaning "packed together."

3) "I think it will tell about whales who sing jazz songs underwater, and humans want to decode them to see if they are saying something." This is a good prediction that shows total grasp of vocabulary, but conceptually there is something slightly amiss. It is highly improbable that whales produce jazz songs (à la Billie Holiday), and more probable that their songs have just one or two properties of jazz. In order to make a good guess about which properties, one needs some knowledge of jazz.

What happens to all the wrong predictions? As the class reads on in the text, predictions become confirmed, disconfirmed, more likely, and less likely. Sometimes the text alone teaches, and sometimes discussion is necessary to pin down the source of a wrong prediction - particularly in the case of vocabulary or misleading conceptual background. Of course, many predictions are simply good guesses that did not happen to turn out.

It is this kind of discussion which cumulatively leads to understanding that text - students' as well as authors' - gives many signals as to what kinds of meanings can be expected. When the writer does <u>not</u> come up with the goods, readers feel irked, gypped, confused, or bored. In the instance of "Whale Jazz," the first paragraph is just such an unpleasant surprise. See how you feel about it:

"Jazz musician Paul Winter raises his saxophone on the prow of his boat and serenades his biggest audience: a group of gray whales that range from 33 to 50 feet long. These huge mammals

have just migrated from the Arctic Circle to the warm waters off of California and Mexico. They gather to hear a concert given especially for them by a musical group who want to blend their own sounds with the calls of the wild." [3]

Since most readers will read the above as the answer to the question immediately preceding ("what do these songs mean to the huge mammals singing them?"), one of the following three responses is likely to occur: 1) Reader says to herself, "Oh, I thought this was jazz for whales. Pardon me." 2) "Well, this does not really answer the question about huge mammals singing. Why are they telling me all this? What did I just read? I don't know. I don't care." 3) "Oh, I see. The humans want to make jazz that includes the whale noises. How does that work?"

As it turns out, none of these basically intelligent responses lead right into paragraph three, and we readers would have been better served if the opening sentence-paragraph had led right into the following:

"The moans, grunts, pings, chirps, whistles, and clicks of cetaceans - the order of mammals that includes whales and dolphins - fascinate the scientists. Why do they make these noises? Recent studies seem to show that many whale cries allow the animals to keep track of each other in their ocean home."[4]

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

The coherence of texts used for instruction of reading comprehension should be very tight. Linda Flower, author of Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing, and researcher of the writing process, has made an often-quoted distinction between "writer-based prose," written as pure self-expression, and "reader-based prose," which uses a variety of strategies to make the writer's thoughts into a smooth trip for readers.[5] If these terms can serve to name the polarities of a continuum, then, as teachers, we need the most "reader-based" material we can find for our students. This means that they will be able as a group to successfully predict over the whole text what it is about and its conclusion or main point. If they could predict from paragraph to paragraph what is coming in any detail, then it is too easy for instructional material. If they cannot predict within the range of the material after two stop-points, then they are not comprehending it. An example of the latter was an experience with a piece about a humanoid creature that was observing humans making camp. Although it was fourth-grade level according to a readability scale, my college readers with 4-6 reading levels could not grasp the concept of a less-than-human, but more-than-ape creature represented by the eye of the narration; consequently the story was unpredictable and totally frustrating to them. This tells the teacher that they could not comprehend it, whether predicting or not (of course, one predicts even as he reads to himself.)

5. Linda S. Flower, "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing," College English, Sept., 1979.

But what about surprises? Does everything have to be predictable? Surprises, and even shocks, are part of the delight of literature.[6] However, delightful surprises are planned for us by poets and novelists, based upon their knowledge of our expectations. For instance, in Arsenic and Old Lace, Shirley Jackson's "The Possibility of Evil," and Edward Albee's The Sandbox, the authors have played turns comical, hair-raising, and bizarre upon our expectations about the behavior of little old ladies. These aesthetic thrills, however, have nothing in common with the jolting discomfitures that await the reader of a class-size pile of student themes. "Good surprises" are themselves part of a pattern of complex coherence.

Yet students need to learn to comprehend poorly written material as well, for there is so much of it in the world, academic and otherwise. In our paradigm of "Whale Jazz" readers, Readers One and Three were able to tolerate disconfirmation, revise their predictions and read on. Reader Two gave up hope of sense and read no longer. Undoubtedly you have had this experience before, but only after you employed several other strategies for getting your bearings. It could have been that Reader Two took three times as long to read the passage as you did, and her anticipation for meaning was exhausted. It might have been that she was taught to read in such a way that she attempts to grasp each word serially, pronouncing it

6. For ways of using this technique to further that delight, see Russell A. Hunt's, "Toward a Process-Intervention Model in Literature Teaching," College English, April, 1982, pp. 345-357.

internally. When the expected meaning does not ooze out of the words, she goes back and reads again, looking for missing sense in the least likely place - back there instead of up ahead. Because poor readers often labor under misconceptions about the whole enterprise, and at best, lack efficient strategies for extracting meaning from print, they need to experience excellent comprehension, and to become conscious of the coherence signals that are used as it happens.

What is it that we teach when we teach the comprehending process using predictive intervention with highly coherent textual material? First, we model that the reading process is a psycholinguistic guessing game, an interaction of mind with text.[7] Students who see themselves as seated in front of a book that confers its meaning stingily, word by word, will see other students interacting with the text, projecting ahead, and they can share in the results. The results of reading to find out in what ways a set of predictions will be confirmed or denied are greater speed and comprehension than occurs in the passive mode, together with a degree of excitement.

Within this process, there are a great many structural signals that good readers know and less able readers can learn. Function words in the text, for example, are a necessity for prediction and comprehension. A student could know every content word in a sentence,

7. Kenneth S. Goodman, "Reading: A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game" and "Behind the Eye: What Happens in Reading" in Harry Singer and Robert B. Ruddell (Eds.), Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading, Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1976.

but lacking an <u>although</u>, a <u>however</u>, or a <u>consequently</u>, miss the sense of a statement completely. Such words can be featured for instruction by the way in which the teacher cuts the text for presentation. Even without special treatment, function words will emerge frequently in discussion over the source and validity of predictions.

Organization patterns of texts are used to enormous effect by readers. The question-answer pattern within "Whale Jazz" is one of the commonest and simplest (though capable of complex variation, such as the rhetorical question). Generalization statements lead readers to expect specific elaboration, while statements of opinion create a positive demand for argument.

Students can learn from reading what expectations particular genres fulfill. A tutorial student twelve years old but reading at a level of 2.5, gave a marvelous and intricate prediction for a story we were reading. When asked what made her think all of that, she said, "Well, it's a Hardy Boys mystery, and they always get into big trouble and then they get saved, or one saves the other." That is genre knowledge. Even without having ever seen an issue of <u>Science Digest</u>, your knowledge of text associated with science and with digests gives you genre knowledge, a useful set of expectations about the kind of language, organization, and content you will encounter. Some of your students may read everything as if it were a narrative, having developed no useful set of expectations for exposition.

Having learned of the predictive intervention technique (known as DRTA in the graduate reading courses), the practice of it with students of all ages and degrees of ability was not only intellectually gratifying, but astonishing to me. From a desire to share the wonder of the view - into the brain of another person while he is in the midst of the act of constructing meaning from print - it was only a short trip to Reader/Writer Junction.

In this place, the viewer has produced the text, has combined, kneaded, and pressed his thoughts into print so that his meaning can go into the world alone, without his voice, his gestures, and facial expressions. At the Junction, he becomes fully the writer. (We are speaking of relative beginners, of course, for the pro's have powerful imagings of audience as they sit alone; they can be conscious of themselves as writers at will.) The newly conscious writer can only watch, mute but fascinated, as his words struggle their way through readers' minds and come out - victorious, defeated, or sometimes impiously bearing new freight. This is the Junction, the heretofore silent interface of reading and writing, where readers talk and writers read aloud. The student author can say, "I've looked at life from both sides now." Already the predictive intervention process performed on the texts of "real" authors has given him a certain knowledge: "In order to make meaning, readers rely very heavily on expectations and on structure. In fact, these two things are so importan. that if the writer doesn't provide expectations and a clear structure, the reader will make up his own."[8] Now he sees

8. Linda Flower, Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1981, p. 139.

from the other side that students do indeed make up their own meanings for his very own thoughts and words. What can he do to make them understand? In terms of our work as teachers, this very desire, laced though it be with frustration, is priceless, the non plus ultra.

At the very same time, students usually experience the incomparable satisfaction of being understood just as they had intended. They now have a new kind of feedback on what works and what doesn't. They can return from Reader/Writer Junction to that solitary place where writing and re-writing are done, bringing with them a powerful elixir, a sense of positive reinforcement - for they did communicate something - along with a sense of what must be "fixed" in order to reach the goal of total communication. (While this may be a philosophic impossibility, in real life, people are often satisfied by feedback that they have been understood completely.)

What can one expect in classroom benefits from engaging in this writing activity besides lots of wonder and motivation? First, just as in the reading activity, students are forced to face the fundamental nature of the writing enterprise. Less-than-excellent student writers frequently do not imagine their school writing as communication, being read by anyone else for content. Or if they do imagine their writing as communication, they are unable to imagine in any specificity what anyone else would make of it.[9] Experiencing their written work as it actually communicates - or misleads, as the case may be, has a

9. Sondra Perl, "Five Writers Writing: Case Studies of the Composing Process of Unskilled College Writers," Diss. New York University, 1978.

number of effects on the students' own writing processes. First, the discussions taking place in Junction City have increasing reference to composing choices, both audience-oriented and otherwise.

"But I knew you wouldn't understand how I got out of the elevator if I didn't tell you how it was constructed first."

"Yeah, but since I didn't know I'd need to know it, I didn't pay any attention at the time."

"Well, I also thought of using the word 'paramedic,' but I used 'emergency personnel' because, to me, it has more class."

Secondly, revision is built into this activity. You can have the group decide, let the individual decide, or hang on to the option yourself, but when a composition is re-composed, there is a new audience for it. That is something any revision, including yours and mine, richly deserves. The old audience knows from the old draft and the discussion around it what you are trying to accomplish, and the best test of its accomplishment is to see if the words can blaze their own trail into new readers' minds. Getting students to see revision as a normal - yea, even desireable - stage of writing was the part of my job I always flunked, before Reader/Writer Junction.

Finally, students come to seek feedback for their writing, so that if they are absent, they will organize their own "junction group," or they will come to school and announce that they had their family organized into responding to their composition the night before. I think that it becomes so positive because the responses feed into the formation of a product in a useful, but non-evaluative way.

No longer does the response come at the end when the student perceives the theme as done (though the teacher does not); no longer does it tell the student what he should do. It tells the writer what happened to some readers as they read his theme, and the writer decides what to make of it.[10]

Not only does Reader/Writer Junction begin to install an audience in the writer's mind as she composes and revises, but it can be used even in the pre-writing stage. Individual students throw out a topic or a topic sentence, and the class predicts possible unfoldings of that germ. Students also can do the same in pairs. This fosters a spirit of play, the pre-commitment speculation which is so important to the inception of any creative project. In some cases, students have discovered an unanticipated forest of ideas that they don't like, and while arguing with the rest of the class, realize a redefinition of a key term or new persuasive approach they will take.

There is one stage of the writing process for which Reader/Writer Junction appears to be useless, and that is editing. Misspellings, left-out punctuation, run-on sentences - none of these cause the slightest difficulty when read by the fellow perpetrators of such mechanical misdemeanors. I had, of course, fondly hoped that they would cause clarity problems, so that my demand to edit would finally be justified. However, this could turn out to be a

10. I also use a few other response-routines which meet the same criteria, but do not involve predictions. They are in Peter Elbow's Writing Without Teachers, New York: Oxford Press, 1973, pp. 85-92.

tinier problem than heretofore conceived, perhaps even a micro-problem, as we grasp that software for the micro-computers now filling up our schools, homes, and offices can "check for a great variety of errors, such as double punctuation, double words, capitalization errors, sexist terms, wordy phrases, clichés, errors of consistency such as subject-verb disagreement, and of course, misspellings."[11]

Lest the public, riding the "back to basics" wave, think that English teachers are thereby superannuated, may we point to the real meaning of this phenomenon. Quoting a senior policy analyst for TWR, Inc., Pat Choate, "The problem is that adults today do not have the literacy skills to function and think in what I call the techno-era. Seventy-five percent of the work force now will be the work force of the twenty-first century. They need more training in thinking skills - the basics are not the basics any more - to function in our increasingly demanding society. The wider community must change its focus from merely the basics to the wider scope of thinking skills within our elementary and secondary schools."[12]

Within our field, two of the components of this "wider scope" are coherence (the making of textual meaning) and comprehension (the re-construction of textual meaning). Perhaps the 3R's will be updated to the 3 C's: coherence, comprehension, and calculation. In high-technology, the big C is no longer computers, but "convergence" - the linking of telephones, televisions, computers, and data bases.

11. Ronald John Donavan, "Writing Made Easier with Personal Computers," Writer's Digest, September, 1982, p. 33.

12. "Close Up: Interview with Pat Choate," Reading Today, a membership newsletter of the International Reading Association, August, 1982.

In our field, it is the theoretical work of the last decade in reading comprehension and writing process that has made possible the beginnings of convergence in our classrooms. Reader/Writer Junction bridges the ever-menacing Communication Gap and is located in the New Frontier.